

# CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

Findings and Recommendations from the  
Missouri Career and Technical Education  
Advisory Council's Marketing Taskforce



COLUMBIA AREA CAREER CENTER

# /01

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## TASKFORCE

### PURPOSE + BACKGROUND

#### DEVELOP RECOMMENDATIONS TO

- . improve the image and brand of CTE
- . create opportunities and pathways for students
- . develop partnerships to grow CTE
- . craft approaches to publicize CTE's benefits

## BACKGROUND

Career and technical education (CTE) programming in Missouri equips high school and community college students with the academic, technical, and employability skills necessary for career and life success. To expand public awareness of the benefits that CTE confers, in fall 2017 the Missouri CTE Advisory Council formed the CTE Marketing Taskforce.

Taskforce work kicked off with a full-day meeting on October 12, 2017. Discussion topics included a review of the Taskforce's purpose, identification of messaging audiences and distribution channels, and options for publicizing information. Hashtags and vision statements for marketing CTE also were crafted. A second, half-day meeting, held January 22, 2018, was used to prioritize messaging tools and offer recommendations to support a cohesive, statewide communications and marketing campaign.

This report documents Taskforce work and offers recommendations to guide the CTE Advisory Council in undertaking a comprehensive communications and marketing campaign to improve the image and brand of CTE. It opens with a rationale for changing the public's perception of CTE, followed by a summary of Taskforce recommendations. The report closes with action steps that the CTE Advisory Council may wish to implement to achieve members' recommendations.

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## THE NEED FOR CHANGE

**Public perceptions of CTE are based on outdated assumptions that equate contemporary programming to the decades-old vocational education model, which focused on preparing non-college bound youth for so-called ‘dirty’ jobs.**

NORTHLAND CAREER CENTER

**Missouri** delivers high-quality CTE programming that connects secondary instruction — offered within school districts and affiliated area career centers — with coursework offered in community colleges and public 4-year colleges and universities located throughout the state. Programming is intentionally designed to equip individuals with the industry-recognized skills, certifications, and degrees valued by employers. All programs undergo a rigorous approval process to ensure that instruction meets statewide technical education standards, vetted by industry advisory groups.

The state has launched groundbreaking initiatives to strengthen its CTE offerings. Recent efforts have included the adoption of performance-based funding to incentivize districts to improve student outcomes, and creation of a CTE Certificate to signal that students have mastered the career readiness skills employers desire. Taskforce members noted considerable statewide support for CTE from the legislature; effective administrative and policy support from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education; strong and active CTE professional associations that support instructor development; and recognition by state business and industry groups of the benefits that CTE affords.



Paradoxically, although Missouri has built an effective system that delivers quality CTE instruction, student engagement lags. Taskforce members attribute low rates of student enrollment to the stigma attached to CTE programming. Simply put, parents and students believe that CTE is an educational alternative for non-academic students destined for low-skill, low-paying jobs. This perception is fed by a lack of understanding of how CTE is currently offered and the educational and workforce advantages that CTE confers. The predictable result is that parents discourage their kids from enrolling in CTE coursework.

It doesn't have to be this way. Nationally, 92 percent of students involved in CTE and their parents report being satisfied with their high school experience, compared to 78 percent of those not engaged in CTE programming. Participation also yields educational benefits. Graduation rates for students who concentrate their studies in a CTE program area are 10 percent higher than the national average. And perhaps most importantly, CTE helps prepare youth for the future, with 91 percent of parents believing that their child is getting a leg up on their career ([Advance CTE, 2017](#))\*.

Key educational decision makers, including local school boards and district administrators, also underestimate the value of contemporary programming. Consequently, they do little to promote policies to expand student access to CTE. The problem is compounded by teachers and guidance counselors, who lacking awareness of labor market demands, steer students away from CTE programs that might prepare them for postsecondary matriculation and career and life success.

\* [https://www.careertech.org/sites/default/files/Value\\_Promise\\_CTE\\_PowerPoint\\_2017.PPTX](https://www.careertech.org/sites/default/files/Value_Promise_CTE_PowerPoint_2017.PPTX)





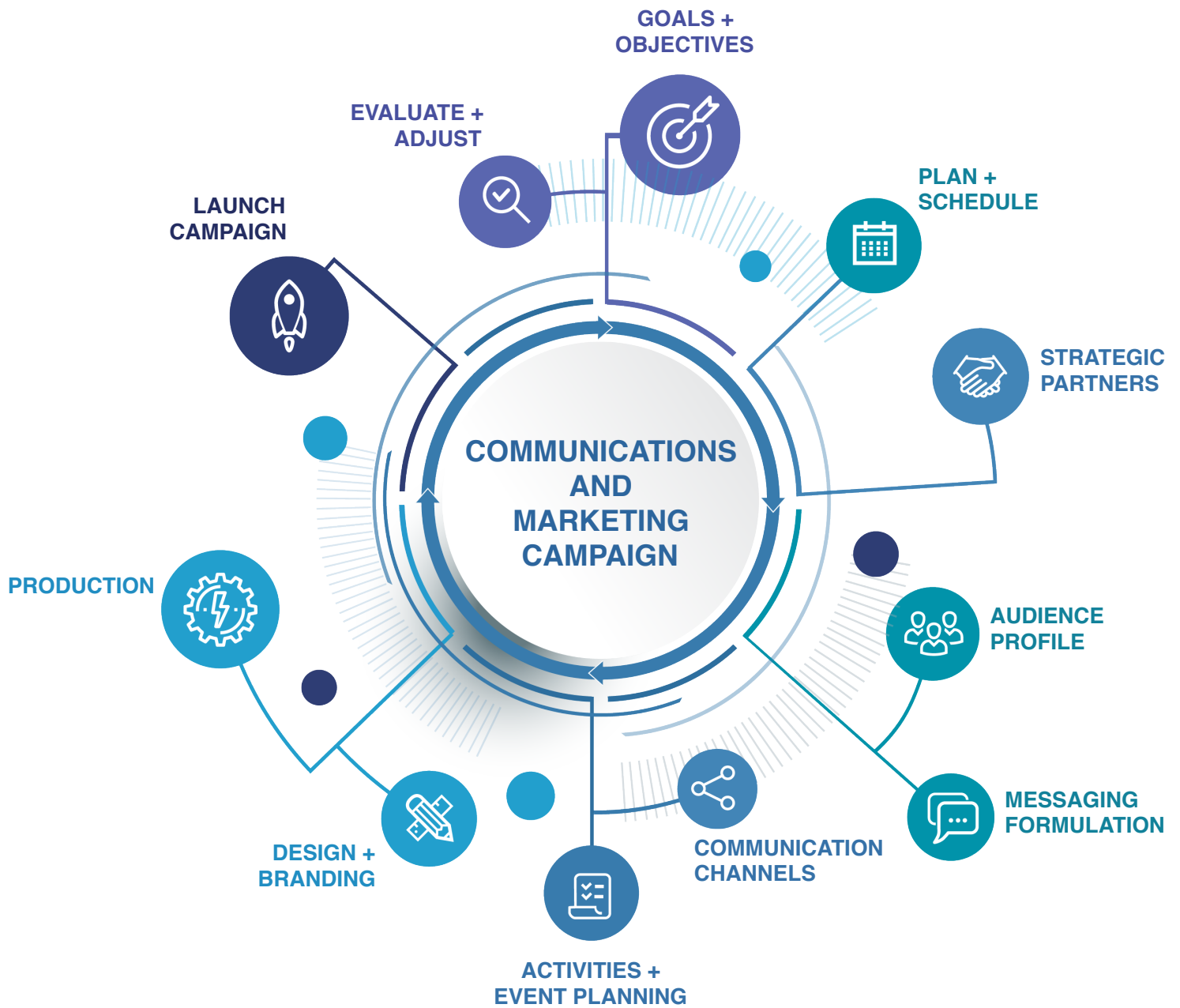
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## CALL FOR ACTION

To improve the public's perception of CTE programming we must fundamentally change how we communicate information, using professional marketing tools and messaging directed at changing people's minds

GRAND RIVER TECHNICAL SCHOOL

**Missouri** needs to launch a systemic and sustained statewide effort to change people's perception of CTE. Publicity work should be managed and directed at the state level, with district and college CTE providers provided guidance and support to reinforce state messaging. Carrying out this work will require the development of a strategic communications and marketing plan to coordinate messaging. The plan should lay out a step-by-step process to ensure the launch of a successful campaign. Plan components, detailed in Figure 1, reflect standard practices used by industry professionals to coordinate a marketing initiative of this type.



**FIGURE1** Strategic Communications and Marketing Plan Components





# RECOMMENDATION ONE

**DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT  
A COHESIVE STATEWIDE  
COMMUNICATIONS AND  
MARKETING CAMPAIGN  
TO IMPROVE PUBLIC  
CONFIDENCE IN CTE  
PROGRAMMING.**



Initial project work should be focused on ensuring a successful project launch. **Considerations that will need to be addressed include:**

### **GOALS + OBJECTIVES**

The plan should open with a clear statement of the overarching purpose of the communications and marketing campaign, and description of the outcomes that it will achieve. To ensure activities align and reinforce state educational priorities, the plan should be developed in consultation with administrators from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the CTE Advisory Council. A subcommittee drawn from the existing CTE Marketing Taskforce can also contribute in framing this effort.

### **WORK PLAN + SCHEDULE**

Steps that will be taken to design and implement the plan should be detailed, along with a timeline for when critical activities will occur. Scheduled activities should align with national and state CTE initiatives, as well as local educational decision points (e.g., student scheduling of coursework). To ensure adequate time is provided for plan development and rollout, the Taskforce recommends an initial one-year investment.

### **STRATEGIC PARTNERS**

State government, public and private sector organizations, and employer associations have a vested interest in improving CTE programming. The strategic plan should be developed in consultation with critical partners, both to vet proposed activities and to provide for their meaningful engagement. While the list of potential partners should be identified as part of the plan development, Taskforce members recommend outreach to national organizations (e.g., Advance CTE, ACTE), and key employer associations, such as the Missouri Chamber of Commerce.

The execution of the strategic communications and marketing initiative should be directed by a CTE steering committee, potentially drawn from the CTE Marketing Taskforce. This committee will provide high-level oversight of project work, with day-to-day management conducted by an individual or third-party firm with demonstrated communications and marketing expertise, and preferably working knowledge of CTE issues.

Messaging activities will need to be targeted toward different audiences, who may hold differing beliefs about the value of CTE. The taskforce has identified four stakeholder groups that should be targeted for messaging. These include:

- 1** Students and parents
- 2** Educational administrators, teachers, faculty, guidance and career counselors
- 3** Employers and the larger business community
- 4** Missouri citizens



## RECOMMENDATION TWO

**TARGET OUTREACH  
TOWARDS KEY  
STAKEHOLDERS, USING  
MESSAGING THAT WILL  
RESONATE WITH  
DIFFERENT AUDIENCES.**



Ultimately, the success of the communications and marketing campaign will hinge on designers having a clear understanding of audience members' pre-existing opinions — be they rightly or wrongly held. We must first know what people believe, and why they hold these perceptions, if we are to fashion an outreach campaign that will change minds.

**In developing the plan, consideration should be given to the following issues:**

### AUDIENCE PROFILE

To ensure that work addresses the interests of identified groups, the strategic plan should include a process for collecting information on individuals' preconception about CTE programming and its relative benefit for students. This may include administering surveys, holding focus groups, and conducting site visits to CTE providers.

### MESSAGE FORMULATION

Information collection should be directed at developing messaging drivers that address the identified concerns of different groups. For example, students may be more interested in hearing information on how CTE participation can make learning more interesting and impactful, and prepare them for a variety of education and career options. Employers, in comparison, may be more interested in hearing about how CTE programming can impart technical and employability skills that will help improved the productivity of new hires and reduce training costs.





RECOMMENDATION

# THREE

**OUTREACH EFFORTS SHOULD INCLUDE A MIX OF PROCESSES, TOOLS, AND ACTIVITIES, WITH DELIVERY TAILORED TO STAKEHOLDERS' DESIRED COMMUNICATION CHANNELS.**



People take in information in different ways; no one approach will work with all audiences. Accordingly, messaging will need to occur through a variety of vehicles, using a variety of tactics, with state CTE administrators and local providers collaborating to achieve success. **Areas that will need to be addressed include:**

## COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Outreach efforts will need to account for the stakeholders' preferred modes of interaction. For example, messaging directed towards youth might make use of social media, with content tailored for platform distribution. Taskforce members identified Facebook, Instagram, Snap Chat, Twitter, and YouTube as potential hubs. Adults, such as parents and educators, may prefer more traditional print communications (e.g., brochures, data), or may be won over with in-person experiences, such as visiting a CTE classroom at an area career center, comprehensive high schools, or affiliated college.

## ACTIVITIES + EVENT PLANNING

Taskforce members identified potential processes, tools, and activities that might be incorporated into the strategic plan. Activities are listed in terms of the anticipated amount of resources and time that would need to be invested to perform suggested work:



**Social Media** Digital communications released on a weekly basis to keep individuals' attention focused on CTE and to advertise upcoming events or activities.

➤ **Lead** State to drive activity with local CTE providers offering items



**Student Ambassadors** School-based events in which youth participating in CTE reach out to prospective students, parents, academic teachers, or employers to educate them about CTE offerings and/or solicit their engagement.

➤ **Lead** Local CTE providers to host ambassadors using state-designed materials



**Media Outreach** Creation of press releases and announcements in a format tailored for dissemination on television and radio. Should provide information about CTE programs and their benefits, where possible aligned with upcoming activities or events.

➤ **Lead** State with local CTE providers contributing content



**Community Engagement** Design of events that may be offered within local providers to help educate students and parents about CTE benefits. Could include activities such as Open-Door Drop-in, Business Partnership Forums, or Low-Cost or In-Kind Work Assistance to showcase the skills students possess.

➤ **Lead** Local CTE providers with state coordinating content



**Teacher Externships** Placing teachers in work settings so that they can interact with employers and learn about the types of skills that are valued in the workplace.

➤ **Lead** State with local CTE providers providing leads to community employers



**Videos and Print Promotions** State- or student-developed tools describing how CTE is offered and its benefits. May include profiles of CTE programs; testimonials about CTE's impact from current students, program graduates, or parents; and endorsements from employers. For example, a student competition to produce a CTE video, with prizes offered to winning entrants.

➤ **Lead** State with local CTE providers providing support to student



**Professional Development** Formal training activities that may be integrated into statewide teacher professional development events to showcase the benefits of CTE and strategies for secondary and postsecondary academic and CTE educators to integrate curriculum within their respective schools and institutions.

➤ **Lead** State with local CTE providers promoting teacher involvement



**Website or Central Clearinghouse** Tailoring the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website or a third-party site to provide information and data on CTE that is targeted to teachers, parents, and students in the form of stories or communications that are free of jargon and easily understandable.

➤ **Lead** State with local CTE providers contributing content

Intended to be illustrative rather than inclusive, this list of potential activities reflect Taskforce members' beliefs about the types of engagement that would be most likely to help change the public's perception of CTE. Ultimately, feedback from stakeholder interviews coupled with the expertise of a seasoned marketing professional, should determine the final set of approaches used to message to the field.





RECOMMENDATION

# FOUR

CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES  
SHOULD BE COORDINATED  
STATEWIDE, WITH CTE  
PROVIDERS CHARGED WITH  
LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION.

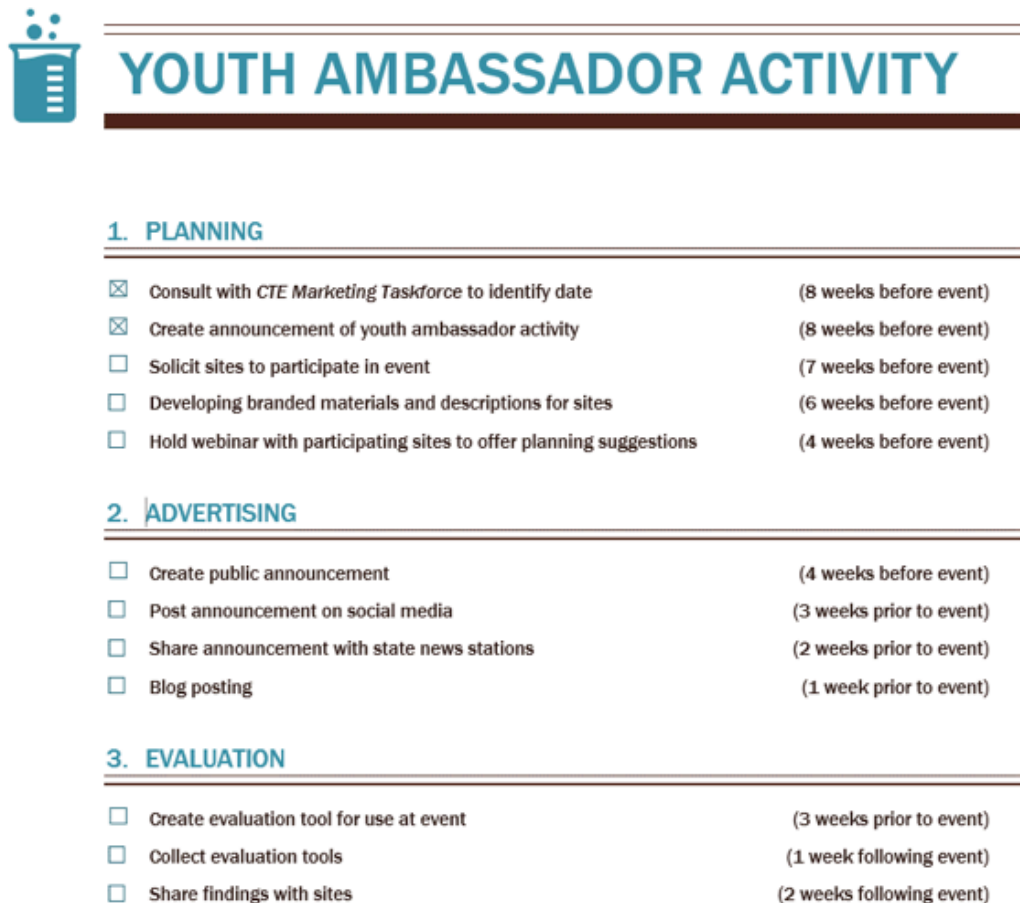


Educators at the secondary and postsecondary levels have the capacity and expertise to carry out a range of marketing functions. What has been missing, to date, is a coordinated statewide approach to messaging. The strategic plan should be designed to produce a consistent and cohesive, statewide, cross-provider approach to telling the story of CTE. **This will entail addressing:**

## PROMOTION + BRANDING

Standardized materials will be needed to ensure a uniform launch of campaign activities. Activities will need to be clearly identified, with local CTE providers given instructions and resources to assist them in conducting site work. These may take the form of planning checklists, publicity templates, and activity supports. Figure 2 illustrates how an activity might be scheduled, using Youth Ambassadors as an example. Materials should be designed in an ‘open source’ format that allows sites to adapt content to reflect their own programming. A consistent brand also should be developed to maximize statewide impact.

Where necessary, informational briefings aligned to messaging activities should be conducted in-person or virtually (e.g., webinar, conference call), to ensure CTE providers understand the purposes of planned events.



**FIGURE 2** Example of Planning Schedule for a Youth Ambassador Activity



## TIMING

The plan should include a month-by-month schedule of activities that describe the date and type of communication to occur, and where appropriate, the role of local CTE providers in supporting messaging. To ensure that activities and content are targeted to state and local needs, the calendar may provide for flexibility in the content and timing of messaging.

Figure 3 illustrates a planning calendar that might be used to coordinate the different activities to be conducted in the first month of the 2018-19 academic year.

2018		September		
MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
27	28	29	30	31
03 Social Media Post	04	05 Materials sent to schools for December Video Challenge	06	07
10 Social Media Post	11	12	13	14 Statewide Youth Ambassador Showcase
17 Social Media Post	18	19	20 Guest Blog: CEO Missouri Business	21
24 Social Media Post	25	26	27	28 Monthly check-in CTE Steering Committee
01	02	Notes: Gray = action item Orange = planning activity Red = planning meeting		

**FIGURE 3** Example of Calendar of Activities to Support the Messaging Campaign



RECOMMENDATION

# FIVE

**IDENTIFY 'MEASURES OF  
SUCCESS' TO SUPPORT A  
FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT  
OF THE STRATEGIC  
CAMPAIGN AND PROVIDE  
DATA FOR COURSE  
CORRECTION.**

**Taskforce** members recognize the complexity of the proposed communication and marketing campaign. Some initiatives will produce the desired outcome, others may work in a subset of providers. And some will fail to gain traction. For this reason, evaluation activities should be integrated into the strategic plan to provide on-going feedback.

This may include a range of approaches, such as quantifying the number of individuals attending events or accessing social media. Interviews with representative stakeholders also may be conducted to assess their changing impression of CTE over time. Identifying a valid set of interim metrics will be crucial to assessing the impact of publicity efforts, since critical measures of student engagement, such as increases in CTE program enrollment will not be available in the project timeline.



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## SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS

Recommendations contained within this report are intended to support the development of a strategic plan to support a comprehensive communications and marketing campaign. Due to the complexity of this undertaking, the CTE Marketing Taskforce is unable to take on this responsibility itself, but believes that action is necessary. **Accordingly, Taskforce members propose the following action steps that the CTE Advisory Council may wish to take to achieve members' recommendations:**

**Draft a white paper** directed toward state legislators and/or the business community, highlighting the need for a statewide initiative to publicize the benefits that CTE confers for students and the state economy.

**Issue a Request for Information** or conduct consultations with third-party communications and marketing firms to determine the level of support that would be needed to hire staff within the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education or a private, third-party firm to create and implement a comprehensive, statewide communications and marketing campaign.

**Identify potential sources of state, foundation, or corporate funding** that can be used to finance the proposed campaign.

**Draft a set of job responsibilities** or a Request for Proposal to hire an individual or private, third-party firm to coordinate and implement the communications and marketing campaign on a daily basis. The recommendations and activities contained within this report may serve as a basis for creating hiring criteria.

**Appoint an oversight committee**, potentially drawn from a subset of the CTE Marketing Taskforce to:

- 1 Coordinate contracting an individual or firm to produce and implement the strategic plan
- 2 Monitor and propose feedback on the contents of the draft plan
- 3 Manage, review, and approve proposed messaging by the individual or firm tasked with carrying out the plan
- 4 Evaluate and provide feedback on work to ensure it meets state needs